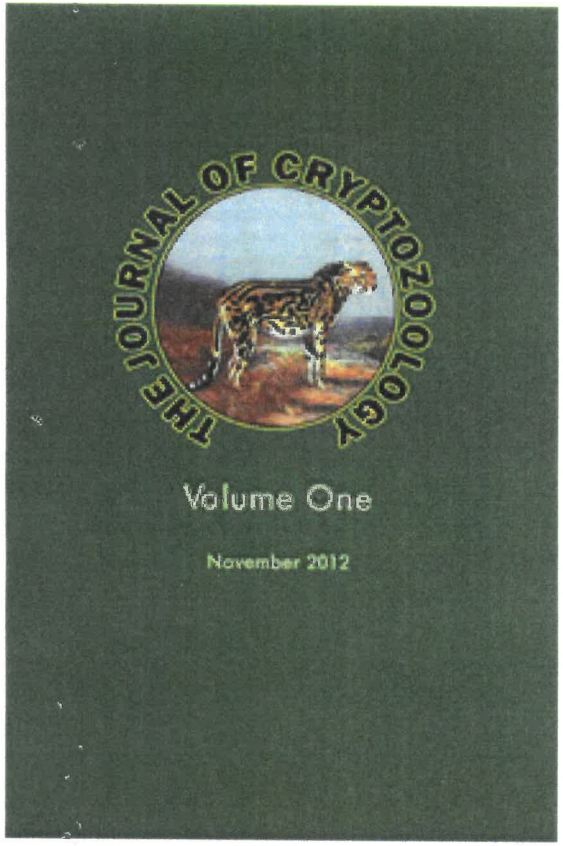

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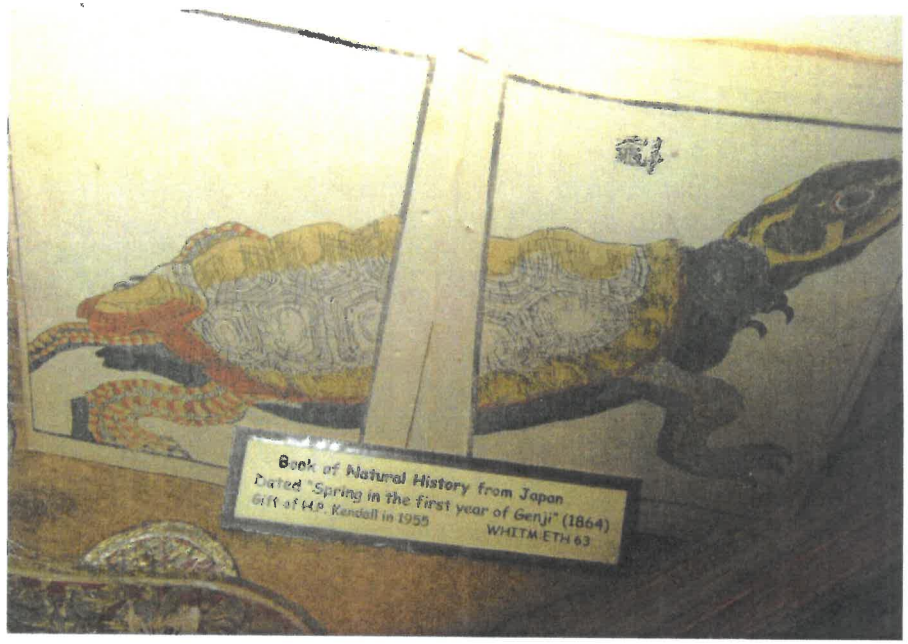

In This Issue: Zanzibar Fish Displays Koran • Seventeenth Century British Toad Monsters • Mary Toft Rabbit Birth Case• Scottish Wonder Boy• Giant Crocodile Ballad • Cats Eyes as Clocks• Chinese Coins in strange places • Japanese Snakes with Two Legs • And more !

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CREDITS

The image on the cover is from the collection of Dr Devo. See also story on pages 61-62. Those articles which have no author given, are mainly extracts from newspapers, blogs, etc. Thanks to Mailbox,Macclesfield, for printing.

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DR DEVOS DIARY

"For I pray God for the introduction of new creatures into this island. For I pray God for the ostriches of Salisbury Plain, the beavers of the Medway and silver fish of Thames." Christopher Smart , `Rejoice in the Lamb`. Poet,naturalist,lunatic (1722-1771)

It`s that time again when you eagerly flick open your new edition of Flying Snake and I`m glad to say I have a selection of treats for you. Those sharp eyed amongst you will have noticed the mistake in F.S. no. 3, the apparition of the Virgin Mary was on the ceiling,not roof of the caravan. I have a U.F.O. story from near Macclesfield which I was surprised to find has its fair share of U.F.O sightings. I have found or indulged in a number of Fortean stories this time, including a brief study of Chinese coins found far beyond China itself, which just goes to show how advanced the Chinese civilisation is. Whilst we were running around in bear skins the Chinese were posting songs on You Tube! Er,well, slight exaggeration but I hope you get my point ! (Nothing as exciting as S.Korea`s Gangnam Style tho`.)

Flying Snake is not yet available on Kindle as I mentioned in Dr Devo`s Diary in F.S 3 because I didn`t get my act together and frankly the whole process is much harder than I thought. However I do have a medium term plan to do a Wikipedia entry on the Flying Snake of Namibia, my talk on which seemed to go down well at Weird Weekend 2012 in Devon. As promised I bring you Part 2 of Carl Marshall`s essay on Giant Snakes but I`ve held over the story of Ota Benga, a Congolese "pygmy" held in Bronx Zoo in the United States as it was claimed at the time (1906) that he was a "missing link." I also intend to publish a study by veteran Fortean Bob Skinner and myself on the entombed bat phenomenon which has uncovered some interesting data.

My late father mentioned the Mary Tofts rabbits case to me several times and so I`m happy to include it here and as you all no doubt agree with me that the Apocalypse is fast approaching and the only survivors will be cats and humans, I also include,so you can prepare yourselves, a feature on telling the time from cat`s eyes. Miaow! I mean, Ciao!

A Relation of a terrible Monſter taken by a Fiſherman neere *Wollage, July the* 15. 1642. and is now to be ſeen in *Kings ſtreet, Weſtminſter.*

The ſhape whereof is like a Toad, and may be called a Toad-fiſh; But that which makes it a Monſter, is, that it hath hands with fingers like a man, and is cheſted like a man.

Being neere five foot long, and three foot over, the thickneſſe of an ordinary man.

The following Diſcourſe will deſcribe him more particularly.

Whereunto is added,

A Relation of a bloudy Encounter betwixt the Lord *Faulconbridge* and Sir *John Hotham*, wherein the Duke of *Richmond* is hurt, and the Lord *Faulconbridge* taken priſoner.

With ſome other Miſſelanies of memory both by ſea and land, with ſome Forreigne Occurrences.

LONDON,
Printed for *Nath: Butter.* 1642.

A Relation of a terrible Monster...called a Toad-fish, etc 1642

God sheweth his wonders in the deep, (saith the royall Prophet) but those wonders are never without wonder, when once they leave their wonted stations, and come (upon what message God knows) to visit us in an unknowne world: their shapes being as miraculous to us, as our element unnaturall unto them. But to the purpose. *Friday* morning, *July* 15 between 4 and 5 of the clock in the morning, a little above *Wollage* , one Thomas West, casting his net upon the comming in of the tide, for Salmon;upon the drawing in of the net, (whose weight and difficulty in dragging portended to him good tidings) on a sudden he found a strange alteration: he sees in the net a Fiend, not a Fish; at the least a Monster, not an ordinary creature. Had not his companion had a better resolution, he would have been rid of his net, then troubled with his guest, so deeply was he struck with the odious shape of it. I now proceed to its shape and dimensions. It is by the vote of divers Gentlemen of great quality that went to see it, such a monstrous creature as scarce can be beleeved ever to have been seen: this morning brought alive into Glove-Alley in Kings street. It is called Toad-fish, and with good reason; for the head and eyes, when it lyes upon its belly, doe perfectly resemble a Toad. But here lyes the wonder, turne him up,or but a little raise his head, and you shall behold the perfect breast and chest of a man: nay you may evidently tell as many ribs, both short and long,as are in a man, and of the same joynture and feature; and two as perfect hands as any man whatsoever. By which it is evident that he swims upright, beating the water with his hands,as we all know how the Toad marcheth with his snowt upwards. His mouth very broad, with three ranks of sharp teeth; whereby it is probable that it is a devouring, ravenous, and prey-booting fish; yet is its mouth the very embleme of a Toad, as likewise its eyes. A Butcher`s

wife coming in hastily to see it, and hearing at the first that there was a strange fish to be seene, and being upon it in the stable where it lay before she was aware, thrusting in among others, started from it with a shreek,crying, *Oh the devill in the shape of a great fish,* swounded, and was faine to be carryed out. The dimensions of the fish are these:

He is in length well-nigh five foot, in breadth a yard over, having on each side two huge fins, in likenesse much like a Thornback, his taile a foot in length, as it were all of a whale bone.

Now the comming up of this monster into the fresh river, and so nigh the shore, is more than remarkable , (never any of this strange kinde ever having beene seen by any age before:) For *Plinie*, the Naturalist, although he confesseth that there is no creature or vermine upon the earth, but hath its like in the seas, and that there is a Toad-fish, yet this Author avereth, that that fish never commeth neare the shore, but is constantly in the depth of the Ocean, as is the Sharke, the Flaile-fish , and others of that noxious kinde, and that he never saw or heard of any taken upon any Coast save one, which was in the yeare that *Nero* (that never-sufficiently detested Tyrant) was borne in, of which he hath this note, that *Monstrum praecessit monstro:* and plainly divines that its arrivall was ominous, as indeed all Histories doe with constant consent maintain and write, that all unusuall births either in men or bruit creatures, in sea or upon land, especially out of their seasons, have ever been the fore-runners and sad harbingers of great commotions and tumults in States and Kingdomes, if not mournfull Heraulds of utter desolation: Witnesse the Heifer calving of a Lambe upon the Altar in Jerusalem, (mentioned by *Josephus)* some halfe a yeare before the dismall sacking, firing, and final subversion of that beautifull and renonwned City by *Vespasian.* A mares foling of a colt with two heads at *Vitellius* (that beast) his entrance into the Roman Empire, who did much mischiefs in his wicked raigne. A Whales comming ashore at *Diepe*, a little before *Francis* the first was taken prisoner at the bataile of Pavia by *Charles* the first, Emperour of *Germanie*, and King of *Spaine*.

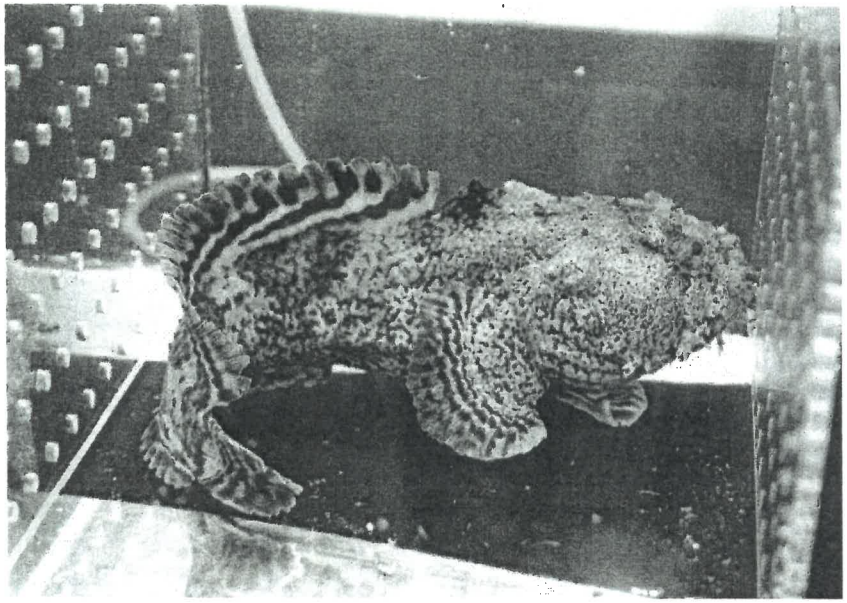

Fig 1 Toad-fish. Wikipedia Creative Commons

These unnaturall accidents though dumbe, do notwithstanding speake the supernaturall intentions and purposes of the Divine powers, chiefly when they meete just at that time when distractions, jars and distempers are a foote in a Common-weale or Kingdome: Messengers of Justice they were ever accounted;nay,they have without missing ever proved themselves to be the same.God in his mercie grant that this ugly monster may not for our sins prove the like to us, seeing the divers sins which are by divers Divines comprised in the nature of a toade,raigne, and have their swinge in our Nation. It is further observed by those that professe skill in Prognostication, that of how much the monster is of feature or fashion, hatefull and odious, so much it portends danger the more dreadfull and universall; God defend their observation may not hold in us,

but surely a creature (if a creature we may call it, though truly it goeth something against the haire, considering its detestable ugly shape) I say a creature more displeasing, and at which humane blood may rise, I never saw with my eye, nor desire to see againe.

Lord we beseech thee turne thy back upon our sinnes,and thy favourable aspect upon our miseries, very likely with more haste then good speede to light upon us. Unite (good God) Head and Members, King and Parliament, encrease their loyall affections to him, his royall approbation to them and their proceedings, whence may proceede in our time His Majesties content and all our securities, and let all true-hearted,plaine-dealing, and plaine-meaning Subjects say *Amen*

A "Winged Toad" in Suffolk in 1662

The following letter, from Thomas Flatman, dated September 25th,1662,to his brother,is in the Bodleian Library,Oxford. I found it in the Early Modern Letters Online database, which I thoroughly recommend. The illustration on the following page is by myself. The transcript below is taken from the style the Bodleian Library sent to me,just as in the original:

Transcription of MS Rawl.letters 107, fol.204

Deare Brother

I have iust leysure enough to answere that part of yours wch concernes the newes of the Serpent- amongst us, I have not seene it myselfe but can name you 20 yt have all agreeing punctually in the[ir] relac[i]on & descripc[I] on of ye same; tis above a yard and an halfe long an head like a toade but very large a yellowish ring about ye neck 2 wings as broad as a mans hand like a Batts 4 yellowe short leggs like a ducke as bigg as a lusty mans Thigh the

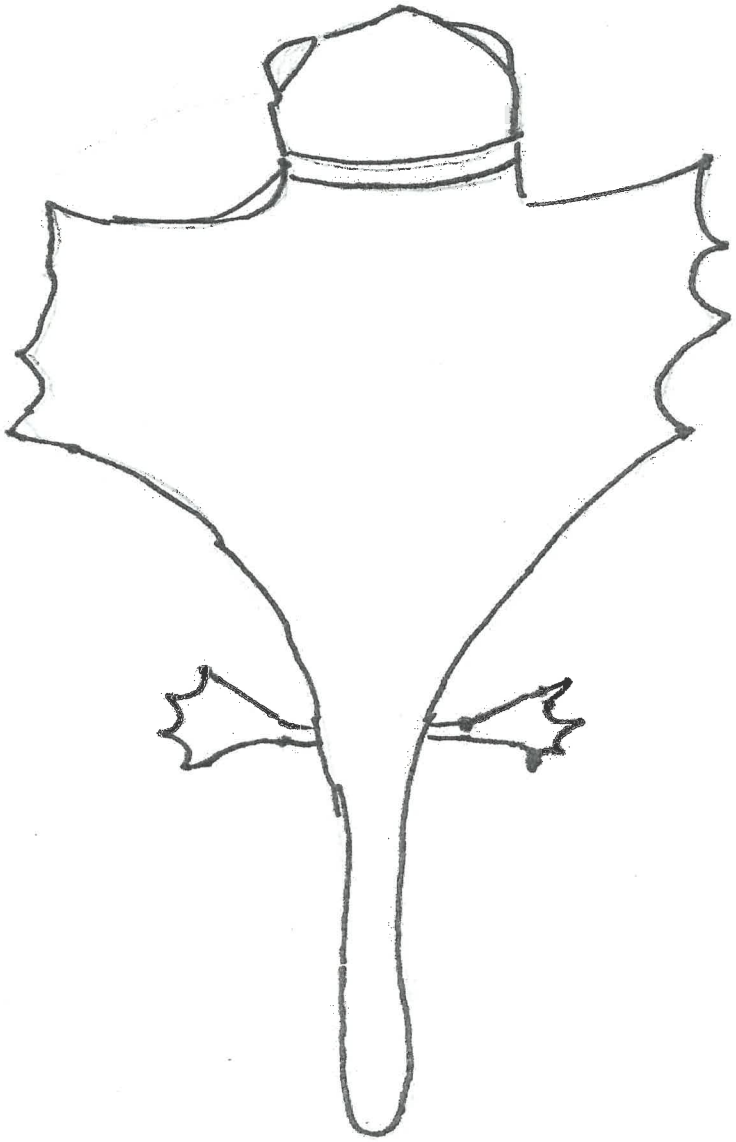

Fig 2 Possible appearance of Toad with wings of 1662.

Front "legs" hidden beneath front "wings".

Belly yellowe speckled with blacke spotts, head and back all covered with thick scales wch shine in the sunne reflect all manner of coullers hee was seen eating a water henn is most often seene before sunn rise in the morning and about noone when the Sunne shines bright and hott. Heere is one affirmes that hee surprised the Serpent one morning and being in a place where hee could not retreate hee ris: & sprung att ye man but mis`t him. The messenger expects my Letter. This with my Love is all the trouble you rec[eave] frome Yo [S?][1]

Yo[ur] hartily affectionate Bro

T Flatman

Mendham

Sept 25 1662 (1)

[1] This is obscured in the text. It is possibly an abbreviation for `Your Servant`.

Dr Karl Shuker in his `From Flying Toads to Snakes With Wings` mentions a Welsh animal known as llamhigyn y dwr or water leaper, as follows:

" One of the most formidable water monsters documented in John Rhy`s exhaustive two-volume opus *Celtic Folk Lore, Welsh and Manx* (1901) was the terrifying llamhigyn y dwr or water leaper, which inhabited lonely stretches of river in Wales and devoured any hapless sheep or other livestock venturing into its freshwater domain. Its body`s shape recalled that of a huge toad, but there the resembled ended. Despite its name, the water-leaper lacked the toad`s muscular, hopping hind legs. Instead, it had a tail- and a large pair of wings!

Nevertheless, this weird wonder did share one notable characteristic with the toad - a powerful voice, literally a hideous shriek, with which it deliberately frightened so thoroughly any unwary travellers seeking to cross the river that they would lose their footing and fall headlong into it. Once in the river, they would swiftly make a brief (and invariably fatal) acquaintance with its monstrous occupant. Happily, the loathsome llamhigyn y dwr does not appear to have been encountered lately" (2)

REFERENCES

1. Letter held in Bodleian Library also found on Early Modern Let - ters Online Database.

2. K.P.N. Shuker From Flying Snakes to Toads With Wings

(1997) pp 105-106.

Frogs and Toads in Early Eighteenth Century Nottinghamshire

Whilst a patient in a Northampton hospital in 1997 I visited the town`s public library and have had a copy of the following document ever since. It is an extract of pages in The Natural History of North-amptonshire (1712), by John Martin, that deal with frogs and toads:

Some Ingenious Gentlemen, that I have talk`d with here, are of Opin-ion that of another Animal of this Class, *viz.* Toads, there are really *Two* different Sorts, one of the Colour of the common Toad; but with a smoother Skin, for the most part, if not constantly, inhabiting the Waters, and watery Places; for which Reason they call it the *Water-Toad;* this Sort the very Worthy Mr. *Kirkham* of *Finshed* tells me has seen in Coitu with a fair green Frog: The other, of a dryer, rougher, and more husky Skin, which is the common Sort. Some others again incline to think that a Toad after all does not differ specially from a Frog, and that what is vulgarly call`d a Toad, is only an old over-grown Frog. I am of a different Opinion from these last; there being very small Toads, so I call them, they having the Colour of the larger ones, and the like progressive Motion: and a Toad having Faculty when provok`d of pissing or of spirting out a black and liquid Matter behind, that a Frog has not. But whether there are distinct Species of Toads with us, I am not so well assured, having never yet had the Har-diness of medling with them so far. That there are in the World differ-ent Species of Toads is certain: And the hairy one call`d the *Spanish Toad,* which was lately in the Physick Garden at Oxford, was proba-bly a different Species from the common. But it must be granted that differences in Colour, and a greater or lesser Roughness of the Skin, such as in the Toads above described, may proceed from accidental Causes, and that Animals thus diversify`d, may nevertheless be of the same Species. And as to that call`d the *Water-Toad,* I am of Opinion,

that `tis only a blacker or darker colour`d Frog; the rather, for that I have in some places observ`d, particularly in a Pit or Well not very deep, by the Road-side below *Thrup-mandeville,* of Frogs a great Variety, as to Colour: some of a lively Green, others a Livid, others of them Yellow, and others in Colour exactly like a Toad; but in Magnitude, in Shape, and in Manner of their Motion, they agreed, and were all of them Frogs. The Toad-colour`d ones were as nimble Leapers as any of the rest; which Variety of Colour I suspect is owing to the Differences in Sex, Age, Vigour, and the Places where they generally feed. `Tis likely the Green and Yellow Frogs in the Well descended down thither from the Surface, and that those of a more sable Hue were bred below. It may by anyone be observed, that those found in green Herbage, that have a clearer sort of Feeding, are of a brighter, those in dirty Holes are of a darker Hue: And that the Male Frogs, about their engendering time, are as black almost as Toads. (1)

Carl Marshall suggested, in an e-mail to me on September 5th 2012:

" Hi Ric,

All I can think of with this hairy toad is that it may have been the monotypic " Hairy" frog Trichobatrachus robustus from central Africa, family: Arthroleptidae, that (I thought) hypothetically could have been unwittingly imported along with some unknown flora by Oxford Botanic Garden, survived the trip, was discovered and for some reason oddly identified as Spanish.

T.robustus also has a disturbing defence mechanism. When threatened they will actually break the nodule connection in their toes forcing the bones out, giving them makeshift claws. This singular activity was witnessed by the late naturalist and zookeeper Gerald Durrell. How macabre!!" (2)

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1. John Martin. The Natural History of Northamptonshire (1712)

2. E-mail from Carl Marshall to Richard Muirhead September 5th 2012

Chinese Coins in Unexpected Places

Richard Muirhead and Bob Skinner

From time to time Chinese artefacts, especially coins have turned up thousands of miles from China`s shores, even as far aware as Ireland. [I`m not looking into the question of the Chinese porcelain seals that have turned up in Ireland as this has been covered elsewhere-R.] In March 2012 Bob Skinner, a Fortean from Surrey, did some research into Corliss` investigation into this matter and turned up the following:

In Corliss` " *Ancient Man- A Handbook of puzzling artefacts*" (1978) the following articles are reproduced:

pp. 429-30: " Chinese coin in Alaskan Burial" - Anon from Nature 46:574-5 (1892)

pp. 430 " Chinese coins in British Columbia"- James Deans;American Naturalist, 18:98-99 (1884)

A few articles re China and the Americas in early times:

p. 709 " China and the Maya" Anon; Nature, 133:68 (1934)

pp. 711-18 " Was Middle America peopled from Asia?" Edward S Mors; Popular Science Monthly, 54: 1-15, (Nov 1898)

p. 718 " The similarity of Chinese and Indian languages" Anon,Science, 62: sp x11, (Oct 9 1925).

Two or three similar articles are also found in Corliss` earlier "*Strange Artefacts- a Handbook of ancient Man"* vol M2 (1976)…

In Corliss` " *Ancient Man - A Handbook of puzzling artefacts"* (1978):

pp. 621-2 " Odd Old Stones" - Pete Pindar; Producers Review, 66:47, October 1976, which includes a paragraph on the find of an Egyptian Scarab in the early 1900s on a North Queensland cane farm. (1)

The October 7th 1944 edition of the Irish paper the Anglo-Celt reported that Master Jim Cleary of Teehill, Co. Monaghan, Ireland,unearthed a Chinese coin dated 1243. (2)

The Epoch Times web site posted the following story dated October 30th 2011 by Joan Delaney:

300-Year-Old Chinese Coin Found in North of Canada

A Chinese coin more than 300 years old has been found near a proposed mine site in Yukon in north of Canada. James Mooney, a cultural re-source specialist with Ecofor Consulting Limited, spotted the coin while doing heritage impact assessment work for Western Copper and Gold Corporation.

"I was less than a metre from our archaeologist Kirby Booker when she turned over the first shovel of topsoil and I caught sight of something dangling from the turf. It was the coin - the neatest discovery I`ve ever been part of," says Mooney.

Minted between 1667 and 1671, the coin was found within the Selkirk First Nation traditional territory on the historic Dyea to Fort Selkirk trade route.

The coin adds to the body of evidence that the Chinese connected with Yukon First Nations through Russian and coastal Tlingit traders during the late 17th and 18th centuries and possibly as early as the 15th century, according to a release from Western Copper and Gold.

Fig 1 A map of Yukon territory

Canada

Wikipedia Creative Commons.

Although common along the northwest coast of present-day North America, only three coins have been found in Yukon to date. The coins are found with a square hole in the centre, but the one found four by Ecofor has four additional small holes above each corner of the central square.

"The extra holes could have been made in China; coins were sometimes nailed to a gate,door, or ridgepole for good luck," says ,Mooney.

"Alternatively, First Nations might have made the extra holes to attach them to clothing. They used the coins as decoration or sewed them in layers like roofing shingles onto hide shirts to protect warriors from arrow impacts." The Russians traded items such as tobacco,tea,beads,firearms, iron implements, kettles,needles,clothing, and flour directly with the Tlingit in exchange for a variety of furs, which they traded to the Chinese in exchange for goods.

Mooney says the location of the find, on a promontory overlooking a river and creek tributary, is a likely place for a traveller to have rested or camped between Dyea, Alaska and Fort Selkirk in Yukon.

Although the coin was discovered in July, he says a fact-checking had to be done and information gathered before the find was announced publicly.The history of the coin is special in that it was a number six in a series of "poem coins" that were used as good luck charms during the reign of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty.

Kangxi was renowned for his poetry. He was also associated with peace, prosperity, and longevity, so people gradually developed the custom of collecting a coin cast from each of 20 mints, putting them on a string and carrying them for good luck. The coins were placed in a certain order to create the poem.

Of the other two Chinese coins found in Yukon, one was minted 1724-1735, and the other, discovered back in 1993, is from between 1403 and 1424. The coin found in 1993 was discovered in a travel corridor near an overland gold rush trail by Beaver Creek. However , because it was found in an archaeological setting, it was likely brought into the interior before the Klondike Gold Rush.

So far I believe each of these three coins was found only with prehistoric materials and no other historic materials, making them likely traded into the interior", says Mooney (3)

"

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1. E-mails from Bob Skinner and various books by W.Corliss

2. Anglo-Celt October 7th 1944

3. 300-Year-Old Chinese Coin Found In North of Canada. The Epoch Times http://www.theepochtimes.com/n2/world/300-year-old-chinese-coin-found-in-yukon-...

Fig 1 Wikipedia Creative Commons

Ancient Chinese Coins

Telling The Time from Cats Eyes

Richard Muirhead

The following story appeared in the **Grey River Argus** of June 11th 1904. This was a New Zealand newspaper.

WHAT`S THE TIME, PUSSY?

According to the French missionary Huc, no man needs a watch or a clock if he has the right kind of a cat. In certain parts of China they can tell the exact time of day or night by looking into a cat`s eyes. The pupil of the eye, assuming that the creature in question is just what it ought to be, gradually diminishes as noon approaches, until it loses completely its oval form, and becomes a thin perpendicular line. When that line is plumb it is 12 o`clock.

Then the pupil begins to grow very gradually, and finally becomes as big and as round as a marble. Then it is midnight. With patience,practice, and good mathematical perception, the happy possessor of a time-keeping cat can tell the hour of the day and of the night, because the thin perpendicular line which the pupil of the cat`s eye assumes at noon gives him a clear starting point.

The missionary discovered this valuable piece of feline peculiarity by pure accident. He noticed a little boy minding a calf, and asked him if he knew the time. The boy ran into the nearest hut, and came out with a big cat in his arms. "It`s just half-past eleven ," he shouted . And, running up to the missionary, he placed the cat`s face under Hue`s nose. Later on, when he got among his converts, he asked them to explain the mystery. They did so, and showed him some living specimens of the precious timekeepers. (1)

This story actually dates back to Huc`s *Chinese Empire* (1854) which says:(according to a posting on Dr Beachcombing`s site www.strangehistory.net - Cat Clocks - No Really! February 28, 2012:)

"One day when we went to pay a visit to some families of Chinese Christian peasants, we met, near a farm, a young lad who was taking a buffalo to graze along our path. We asked him carelessly, as we passed, whether it was yet noon. The child raised his head to look at the sun, but it was hidden behind thick clouds, and he could read no answer there. `The sky is so cloudy`, said he, `but wait a moment`; and with these words he ran towards the farm, and came back a few minutes afterwards with a cat in his arms. `Look here` , said he, `it is not noon yet`; and he showed us the cat`s eyes, but pushing up the lids with his hands. We looked at the child with surprise, but he was evidently in earnest. `Very well`, said we, `thank you`and we continued on our way…

As soon as we reached the farm…we made haste to ask our Christian friends whether they could tell the clock by looking into a cat`s eyes. They seemed surprised at the question; but as there was no danger in confessing to them our ignorance of the properties of a cat`s eyes, we related what had just taken place. That was all that was necessary; our complaisant neophytes immediately gave chase to all the cats in the neighbourhood…

They brought us three or four, and explained in what manner they might be made use of for watches. They pointed out that the pupils of their eyes went on constantly growing narrower until twelve o`clock, when they became like a fine line, as thin as a hair, drawn perpendicularly across the eye, and that after twelve the dilation recommenced."(2)

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1. Grey River Argus June 11th 1904

2. Cat Clocks - No Really! February 11th 1904 www.strangehistory.net

A Giant Crocodile Ballad

I found the following interesting ballad on the National Library of Scotland`s web site (1).It`s just a piece of doggerel really.

This most wonderful song came out of the Poet`s Box, and can only be had there for the price of One Penny

AIR - End for End Jack

Come list, ye landsmen, unto me,

To tell you the truth I`m bound,

Of what happened me whilst I was at sea,

And the wonders there I found.

Shipwreck`d was I, just off Peru,

Scarce half a league from shore,

So, resolved was I, to have a cruise,

The country to explore.

Oh! ri tol de rol, &c

I scarcely there had scudded out,

When close long side the ocean,

I saw something move, which, at the first, I thought,

Was all the world in motion.

I quickly bore longside of it
And found `twas a crocodile,
And from his nose to the tip of his tail,
It measured five hundred miles.

Oh! ri tol de rol, &c

This crocodile, I could plainly see,
Was not of the common race;
I was obliged to climb a very high tree
To get a sight of his face!
My eyes! When he did ope` his jaws -
Now, perhaps you`ll think it a lie,
`Twas above the clouds for miles three score,
And his nose quite touched the sky.

Oh! ri tol de rol &c

I being aloft, the sea ran high,
It blew a gale from the south -
Lost my hold, and away did fly
Into this crocodile`s mouth;
He quickly closed his jaws on me -

He quickly closed his jaws on me -
Thinking to grab a victim -
But I ran down his throat, dy`e see,
And, (damme) that`s the way I trick`d him

Oh! ri tol de rol, &c

I travelled on for a month or two,
`Til I got in his maw,
Where I found of rum kegs not a few,
With plenty of bullocks in straw!
Of life I banished all its cares -
For, of grub I was not stinted;
In this crocodile ten years I lived,
And was jolly well contented.

Oh! ri tol de rol &c

This crocodile being very old,
Alas! One day he died;
He was full five years a-getting cold,
He was so long and wide!
His skin was five miles thick, I`m sure,

Or somewhere there about,

For I was full six months, or more,

Cutting a tunnel to get out.

Oh! ri tol de rol, &c

So, now, you see me safe on land,

Determined no more to roam;

In a ship that I passed I got a berth,

So you see me safe at home.

But if my story you should doubt -

If ever you travel the Nile,

Just where he fell you`ll find the shell

Of this rummy crocodile.

Oh! ri tol de rol &c

REFERENCE

1.http://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/16426/criteria/Crocodile

A Wonder Boy

This strange story was found at the same time as the Crocodile ballad. I don`t know whether it`s well known or not, but I thought I`d include it in ***Flying Snake*** anyway.

"Wonder of Wonders, or the Speech of a child born near Edinburgh on Thursday the 15th of March 1770 as delivered ten minutes after it came into the world.

In all ages scarce such an instance is to be parrelle`d as the present incident, which whatever the public may think is assertain`d for truth.

On Wednesday the 14th of March a farmer`s wife near Edinburgh being within a short time of her delivery, being weary`d and went to bed, and after an hour`s sleep arose and said to her husband,

My dear, I have had a sweet sleep and has but few hours till I bring forth a Son, who will tell what shall shortly happen.

Accordingly, on Thursday following, the woman was happily delivered of a son who also as was born spoke the following words.

This year will be a bloody year, there will be war proclaim`d before the end of it, but the christian powers shall obtain the victory; Highest powers shall be insulted; Wilkes`s party shall be sadly dismay`d on account of their irregular conduct; while the SCOTS shall be prais`d for loyalty to their King; London, London, the seat of our rightful Sovereign, the Thistle is sharp, but never sting`d you;But the charming rose, in its full bloom, so cheers the hearts of the 45th party, that the Honourable Ancient Thistle appear, they mind nothing but revelling; but says the child, or the end of the

the year 1770 forty five blue bonnets will drive 300 Freeholders to flight, Wilkes, the unhappy instrument of our disturbance shall with his party be brought to disgrace and be oblig`d to bow with reverence, to them whom they ineffectually endeavour`d to afront.

So spoke the child, and immediately expired. (1)

REFERENCE

1. http://digital.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/16824

CARL `S COGITATIONS:

GREAT SNAKES OF THE WORLD

PART TWO

" As to what is meant by weird - and of course weirdness is by no means confined to horror - I should say that the real criterion is a strong impression of the suspension of natural laws or the presence of unseen worlds or the forces close to hand." H.P. Lovecraft in a letter to Wilfred Blanch Talman August 24th 1926

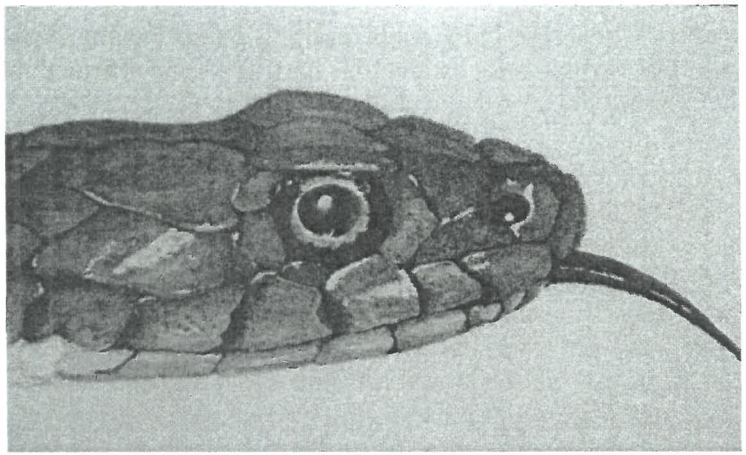

Fig 1 Head of an European Grass Snake . Natrix natrix.

Collection of Carl Marshall

North Africa. Unknown crested snake:

Very large crested snakes are reported from eastern Morocco to Tunisia (also see Crowing Crested Cobra - Central/Western Africa), could they somehow be surviving pythons? or something completely new! The crests reported may just be where old or unhealthy individuals are struggling to slough (shed) their skins completely with some skin retained around the neck and head and building up over successive moults until they eventually resemble very old crested snakes. This author has researched these cryptids in Morocco and found they are still reported.

Central/Western Africa.

Rock python:

The rock python (*Python sebae*) is a large species from sub-Saharan Africa. There are two sub-species, one from Central/Western Africa and the other from South Africa.

P. sebae is Africa's largest species of snake with specimens reported (but not confirmed) of individuals reaching and exceeding 20 ft (6 metres+). Although these estimations haven't been confirmed they are considered, by most to be quite possible.

This species lives in a variety of habitats near water from forest to near desert and they have been known to eat antelope and even crocodiles which they kill via constriction.

This species has killed humans and actually eaten children;

A Uganda newspaper reported in 1951 that a 13 year old child had been killed and consumed by this species. Although the child was eaten he was later regurgitated.

In 2002 a 10 year old child was confirmed to have been eaten in South Africa.

Could this species or a similar one (albeit a larger type) be responsible for the giant snakes reported in much of central/western Africa?

Crowing Crested Cobra:

Stemming from folklore similar to the Basilisk or Cockatrice, the Crowing Crested Cobra is considered to be a large snake but with three very significant differences

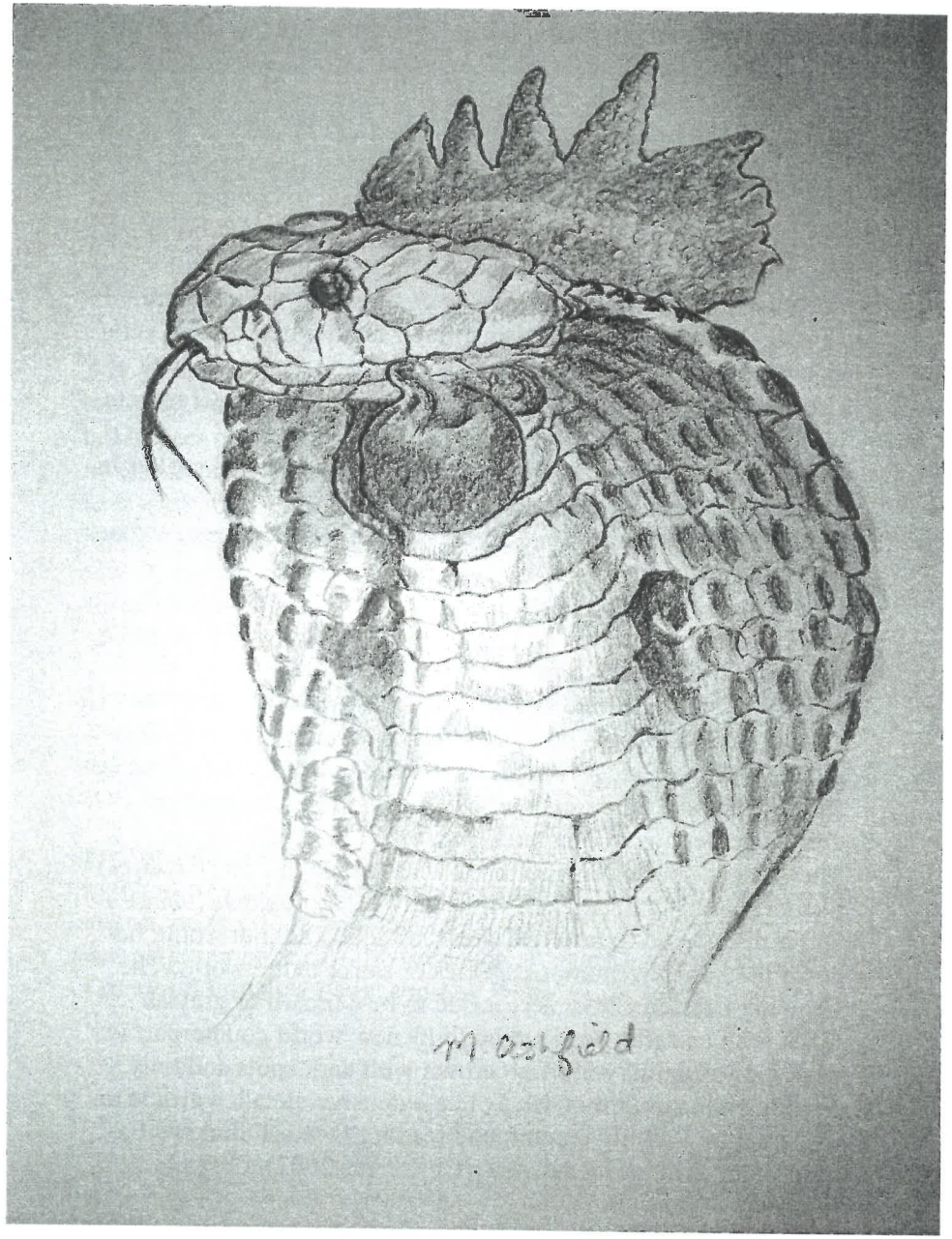

Fig 2 Drawing of crested snake by Maureen Ashfield (modified spectacled cobra Naja naja.)

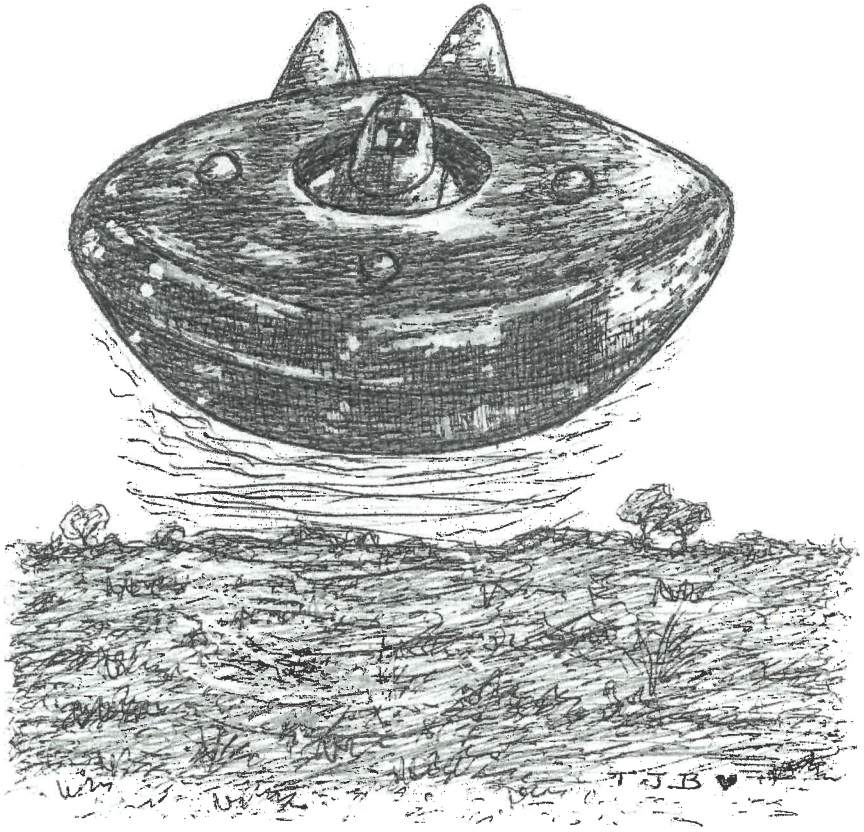

Fig 1 Trevor Bailey`s own impression of the U.F.O he saw in Sutton, Cheshire.

Purists will realise that as U is a vowel, I should have written "an U.F.O.", However, I thought "a U.F.O." sounded better.

Words from The Koran on an Indian Ocean fish

MYSTERIOUS FISH WITH STRANGE ARABIC INSCRIPTION

Wide World Magazine Late 1917/Early 1918

The first sentence says: "The accompanying photograph (see page 37-Rich) depicts a remarkable fish which was recently caught at Zanzibar with strange Arabic inscriptions upon its tail [it] appears that the fish was not of a large haul, and was taken by a single fisherman, who brought it to the fish-market. There it remained for some time, having no purchaser as it was one that had never been seen before in those waters. Finally an Indian of the sect called "Memon"bought it, and, on the strange markings being noticed, it was taken to a well known Arab scholar, who deciphered the inscription. It was afterwards sent to the Sultan, who also recognized the wording. That night, three thousand rupees were offered for the fish and refused, and on the following day five thousand rupees were refused. The original price paid for the fish was a penny, and it was eventually decided to have it preserved. For this purpose it was taken to the Government Laboratory, where it was treated with formalin. It has since been placed on public exhibition. There are two distinct inscriptions on the tail, one on each side. One reads " The work of God", and the other, "God alone". There is no suspicion of anything in the nature of a fake about the matter, and the mystery is so complete that no explanation of the strange phenomenon is forthcoming. The Arabic lettering is perfectly plain, and the discovery has caused wonderment throughout the Mohammedan community of Zanzibar. They declare it portends something about to happen, possibly the end of the war.

the end of the war. In the course of conversation with a prominent East African official we gather that the only previous case of a similar nature known occurred in Tibet, where certain Hindustani wording appeared on the leaves of a tree. The whole of the circumstances are certainly very strange. (1)

On May 19th 2006 the BBC News reported : Kenya`s **`Koranic Fish` Recovered** - A fish with markings that resembled a Koranic text has been found by Kenyan officials after vanishing from the fisheries office where it was stored.

The tuna fish, which had provoked intense interest from Muslims, had apparently been stolen by people posing as National Museum officials.

The fish was found at the shop where it had first come to public attention.

The fish was being studied to find out if the Arabic inscription "You are the best provider" was natural or a hoax.

Sceptics say the writing was the work of someone who caught the fish and then threw it back into the sea.

But others say this would be impossible, and local imams are said to be talking in the mosques about the fish.

Heritage

The owner of the Takaungu Fish Shop in Mombasa`s old town is being questioned by police, who are also seeking another man in connection with the alleged theft.

The shop-keeper said a man had brought the fish to him for preservation.

Over the weekend, people thronged to the shop after the owner noticed the tuna fish`s remarkable markings.It had been caught by fisherman Said Ali at the end of last week at Vanga, a small fishing port on the Kenyan coast, 50km south of Mombasa. For safekeeping, the 2.5kg (five pound )fish was moved to the fisheries department. After being asked by Muslim leaders in Kenya, Kenya`s National Museum had offered to take custody of the fish and preserve it for the country`s heritage.The reported theft followed numerous attempts by locals and Muslim scholars to buy the mysterious fish. An official at the fisheries department in Mombassa said someone had even offered to pay as much as $150. Under normal circumstances the fish would fetch not more than $6. (2)

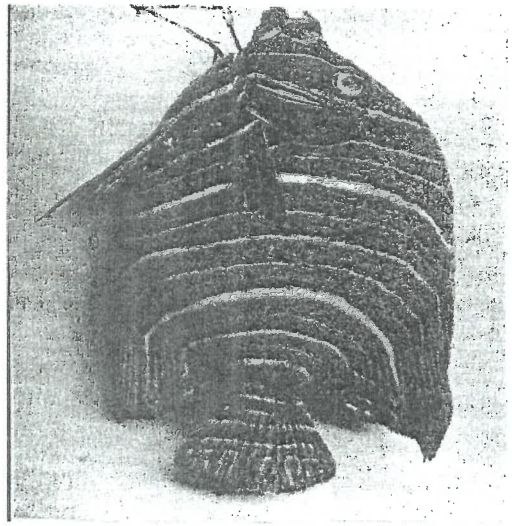

Fig 1 The 1917 fish with the Koranic inscription.

REFERENCES

1. Wide World Magazine Late 1917/Early 1918

2. BBC News web site May 19th 2006

Interview between Carl and John Marshall and Anthony Quiney regarding The Beast of Burford

This Interview with Anthony Quiney (A) ex game keeper of the Ragley estate concerning big cats roaming the local area was conducted by Carl and John Marshall . The transcript is accurate, which represents Anthony's local terminology.

Interviewees : Carl Marshall (C)
John Marshall (J)
Permission was asked and given for Anthony Quiney's name to be disclosed during this interview.
Interview started at 2:10 pm
The following interview starts abruptly because Anthony started his story before I (Carl) had got the Dictaphone ready and when recording he started where he left of.
A: Yea, so there was this chap Quinton Rose, and he came up from London Zoo with viles of leopard pee to lure one in, and baited areas, put up cameras stuff like that. He showed me a map of all over the country where unusual species had been seen, there was a Wolverine up in the north somewhere, up on the moors that was.
C : Really that's interesting.
A : Yea, well because of this dangerous animals act people were just chucking them out, you know.
C : I certainly do.
A : And that's where this leopard, well pair of leopards (comes into the story) and there was one over at Hanly Swan and this was a male, and the female was here and her area goes from say Ragley was the start, she goes up the Lenches, she goes round to Flyford Flavel right over towards Worcester, Feckenham all that area, she's been seen up Marlcliff. Now about twelve years ago a chap was combining at Salford lodge now he said he saw her coming out of the corn back towards the wood and she had two cubs with her and that Quinton Rose he went out and interviewed this chap, but I know a lot of people who've seen her, Iv'e never seen her though but I know a lot who have, including my wife. C: Oh really, OK. A: Could I maybe talk to her about it sometime?

A : Sure. Oh there was this young lad kicking a ball over at Cold Comfort farm, he was about twelve years old, anyway he stopped kicking the ball and was watching a dove which had landed on the track, you know a farm track. He was just stood watching this dove when this leopard jumped through the fence grabbed the dove and turned, and she was only about three to four yards away from him, starred at him for a second then went off with the dove. He said she had grey hairs around her ears which could imply she's getting on a bit, you know quite old and he was on about the length of the tail and everything, you know he described her really well, and again this Quinton Rose interviewed him like.
C : Right OK.
A : Yea.
C : And what year was this?
A : Well I'm going back about twelve years now I would think so were are we know?
J : That would be about 1999.
A : Yea.
C : Its a real shame you haven't seen her with your own eyes.
A : Yea I would love to have seen her. But like I say I know a lot who have, Lennie Quiney (no relation) down at the saw mill he's seen her and both of the herdsmen who used to be up Ragley they seen her as well.
C : I was originally told that these animals was shot and were buried at Ragley is this true?
A : No.
C : OK so we will forget that then.
A : You know, a friend of mine shot a civet.
C : Oh really that's interesting
A : Yea.
C : Back on the leopards for now, do you know how big the cubs were?
A : No, you will have to speak to Graham Mills, he was on the combine, as far as I know he said all he saw was an adult come out and there was two cubs behind her, you know they came out of the corn.
C : And did he live local?
A : Yea Abbott Salford.
C : OK did you find any animal kills out there or any tracks or scat?
A : We did have a dead pit which they could have in those days, this was up at Ragley, and there was several calves took out of there and taken into the woods. But I said to Quinton Rose " I'm surprised we haven't found any kills up trees " and he said They only do that on the African

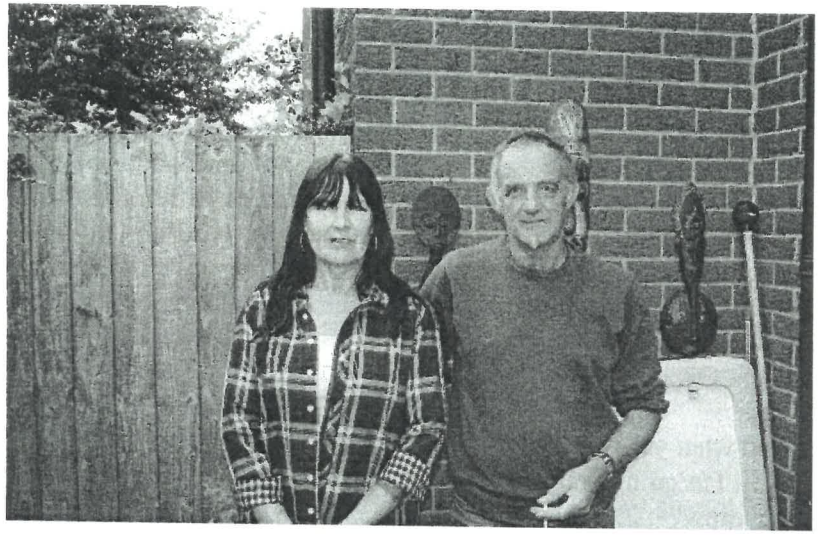

Fig 1

Mr and Mrs Quiney

they only do that on the African savannah where the leopards are not the top predator the lion is."C: Yea . A: The lion would just take their food you know. C: Can you tell me of any other unusual species you have seen or heard during your career as a Game keeper? A: Yea a friend of mine shot a civet cat, that was over at Wellesbourne that was. C: Right OK. A : Yea so he shot a civet, and there was a skunk found and taken over to the Vale Wildlife Park that was found somewhere in the Vale.
C : Yes I`ve heard about this.
A : But that's not so long ago.
J : Skunks are also commonly for sale so they breed them in the country I bet there is a lot of escapes. You see them in the Cage and Aviary magazine all the time.

A : I remember years ago going to a Civil Engineering show, it was in Hertfordshire I think, no it was Bedfordshire and there was a load of wallaby's in the next field over which had escaped from some wildlife park and were breeding quite well.
C : Yes there are lots of reports of wallaby's over the country.
A : Yea, they have been seen on Cannock Chase
C : Cannock chase does seems to be a bit of a hotspot.
A : We used to get a lot of different birds on Ragley, we've had hoopoe's there. Bee eaters, yea bee eaters have been seen many times at Hillers car park and one time a very large unknown bird of prey was seen soaring there that could not be readily identified by the ornithologists there.
C : I am not familiar with the hoopoe.
J : Also called the muck bird, it comes from Africa has a big crest on its head and it turns over the soil looking for grubs that's why they call it the muck bird.
C : Thank you. Going back to the big cats briefly what colour was the adult female.
A : It was all black.
C : Melanistic, thankyou.
A : Evidently people who have seen her up close said they could still see brown spots through the black, you know so if you see her a few meters away she would look black but if you got up close you could still see spots. That's what people have told me anyway. remember I have never seen it.
C : Any idea what colour the cubs were?
A : No like I said you will have to talk to Graham Mills. I tell you what I will go and have a word with him and if its ok I will take you over to meet him.
C : That would be great.
A : Yea I think it was Graham in the combine but if it wasn't he was in the tractor moving corn, but who ever was in the combine was the one who saw it so I will talk to Graham and find out who was driving the combine and they will probably be able to tell you more.

The most regular place it was spotted was Rous Lench Court, it is an old Tudor court and they have got a very big yew hedge there and at the bottom of this yew hedge there was an area with a build up of yew leaves and she used to sleep there quite a bit.
C : OK that's interesting. Do you have any ideas what it was mainly feeding on?
A : Muntjac, definitely muntjac.
C : OK.
J : There was a lot of muntjac in Ragley wasn't there?
A : Oh yea, the area she covered was covered with Muntjac. But she would go for anything though you know.
C : Yea.

TEA BREAK.

(Anthony carried on the interview where we left off)
A : And there was those calves out the dead pit and she dragged them out and over a fence into the wood and they were found skinned out which is usually a cat isn't it?
C : Yes quite possibly.
A : That chap Quinton Rose, he's is dead now, he was only thirty seven. Yea he went to the dentist to have a tooth out and he got septicaemia and was taken into hospital seriously ill and when his father came to visit he didn't recognise him his face had swollen up that much you know, his head, his shoulders, everything. Yea and he died from that.
C : Yes I have heard of him before.
A : He made a trap, a live catch trap, it was such a good design it is used a lot now in Canada for catching all manner of animals because it comes in different sizes, so he actualy designed it. You know it was brilliant, he showed me, he put his hand in and it could hold him and didn't mark him.
C : Anthony, this story may get published so do you mind your name being used?
A : No, not at all.
C : Fantastic
J : Did you experience anything unusual while you were a keeper at Charlbury?
A : No nothing, we used to get deer there like sika, nothing that you

might call exotic.
A : Quentin showed me a map of the British isles with unusual species on it, there was a bear right up north, there was all sorts of things. The police got involved when my friend shot the civet cat and he had to dig it up so it could be verified, he actually buried it.
C : Do you know of anyone seeing big cats in the area recently?
A : I will find out a bit more about it, I haven't heard of anyone seeing for years but I will ask around. If it was the same individual it would be a hell of an age now but maybe the cubs are still about.
C : And did you see the dead calves yourself?
A : Yea I saw the calves and they were big they weren't small calves they were quite big.
C : Also with cat kills the cat usually eats the prey from the back-end upwards is that how they were?
A : That's how it was.
C : It would be interesting to find out what colour the cubs were.
A : Well I will go speak to Graham mills see what he says. I mean I cant remember if he was driving the combine or moving the corn on the tractor. It was the combine driver who saw spotted them.
C : So where was this sighting again?
A : It was over at Salford lodge in Bevington Waste so its not to far away.
C : Have you heard of any surviving pine martens in this area?

A : No, polecats are fairly common but these are really just feral ferrets with traditional polecat markings. Pine martens are not impossible, they are in Ryadar in Wales and that's not to far from Worcester is it.
C : No.
A : I have seen many dead polecats on the roads.
C : So when this big cat was around there were many other corroborating sightings to confirm it?
A : Yea they were seen all the time by dog walkers etc
C : OK.
A : I know lots from the Ragley estate who have seen it, weather they are still working there I don't know, but Lenny is, Lenny's still there so if you want to have a chat with him.
C : What's the current head keeper like?
A : Paul.

C: Yea. A: I don`t really know. I know of him. C: Do you think he would let me have a look around?
A : That I don't know.
A : You see when Quinton came it was Lord Heartford who rang me up and said this chap was coming because what he wanted to do was take a DNA sample of it to see where it was released from. If you kept them in captivity you had to have a blood sample taken of the cat so it could be checked out in case it attacked anybody, so he was trying to get a sample so whoever released it could then be prosecuted.
A : The hunt were in Grafton wood over near Flyford Flavel and they put it up there, that was the
West Warwick's , and a lot of the huntsmen saw it and there dogs wouldn't go near it. So if you talk to members of the local hunting fraternity they might be able to help you. Iv'e also heard of farmers out that way who have sheep go missing but what it was, I don't know.
C : Did you see any tracks on the Ragley estate?
A : Well if you look at mud, mud seems to enlarge most tracks anyway so if someone goes down with a big dog you know, but cat prints don't have the claws.
Iv'e rang up Quinton at times and told him of these tracks in so and so gateway and he just said no that's a dog print or whatever. But he actually sat up at Rous Lench Court and filmed it, yea he set up cameras there. They were good enough to let him stay in the house. There was this old chap there who used to see her regular on his lawn as he was having his breakfast. So Quinton stayed a few nights and actually filmed it there, so it is on film.
I think the powers that be know they are here but don't want to alarm the public. There was one chap who was ex army who took a shot at it in Inkborough church yard, he was roost shooting - waiting for pigeons coming in to roost , and he walked back through the church yard the leopard saw him, well they came upon each other. The leopard went to get away from him and in such a rush jumped into a tomb stone, came back at him, took a swipe at him, and he took a shot at it. He had on a waxy coat and the claw marks went through the waxy and into his shirt. Maybe If you go over Inkborough you will find out more about this.
C : I take it he missed? A: Yea
C : So Quentin also believed that a female was in this area?

A: Yea that`s right.It was definetely the female who was here the male was over at Hanley Swan which is Worcester way. C: OK.
A: I am only going by what that Quentin Rose told me. Whatever dragged those calves out of dead pit was obviously very strong.C: Well thanks very much for your time Anthony this has been great. A: No problem, I will speak to Graham Mills and get more information on the cubs.

C: That would be fantastic

A: OK

Interview terminated at 3:00 p.m

NOTES: When I first heard of these encounters with the 'Beast of Burford'...I thought to myself I can't believe anyone hasn't looked into this story before. After all, this tale in its preliminary condition had some very interesting twists to it. First of all the adult female that was supposedly haunting the Ragley estate was originally described to me as " A normal phase leopard " and three cubs of unknown colour were also described. The three cubs soon became two and appeared to be the main subject of this story because all "three" were apparently shot in a corn field on the outskirts of the estate and buried in shallow graves within the grounds of the estate. I thought I had stumbled on a big cat story well worthy of investigation, imagine if I could locate what was left of these corpses and get a DNA sample, what a story this would be. Of course this was not the case as you will read later. I previously believed it had happened around 1981 as it turned out I was completely wrong.
Anthony Quiney is a very interesting man, he has very good knowledge of the local wildlife in the area having spent many years as a game keeper being out in the thick of it so to speak looking after game animals by preventing predators attacking them. As far fetched as it sounds Anthony can tell by the calls of blackbirds what predators are in the immediate area, a talent not to be underestimated with his occupation.
However Anthony (as did I) made a few mistakes during the interview which I am going to address below.

Comments: So much for the normal phase Leopard.(spotted) After interviewing Anthony the normal spotted leopard soon disappeared into the shadows only to be replaced by the more traditional black panther. I was disappointed because as far as I am aware there have been no, or very few, reports of normal leopards in the United Kingdom and there are literally thousands of melanistic (black panther) reports, which can be blurred into a modern feline comparison of the ancient black dog legends of England such as the infamous Black Shuck.

The Dead Cubs.
My reference to the dead cubs was based on information that was inaccurate and from a different source. The only part of Anthony's story that mentions shooting leopards is when the adult female was shot at in Inkborough church yard by the ex army soldier roost shooting. I am going to look into this attempted shooting in more detail soon but for know I am inclined to have doubts about the legitimacy of this part of the story.
It all happened in 1981.
According to Anthony's testimony and my own post interview research this all happened between 1997 and 1999.

Quentin Rose.
Anthony stated in the interview that Quentin Rose died at the age of thirty seven where as my research imply's he was actually forty six. I haven't been able to find out the exact cause of his death but according to Neil Arnold's site from the CFZ (Centre for Fortean Zoology), Quentin Rose was a chronic diabetic and this probably contributed to his untimely demise. Neil has currently sent me an email informing me that he has more information on this subject ASAP. I await this email in anticipation.
It seems that Quentin investigated the Ragley beast with his good friend Chris Bosley and together they apparently set up a water proof tape recorder and laid down lion urine and dung to try and draw the leopard in. I don't know quite how useful this method would have been as I believe this would not have attracted a leopard but rather discouraged it even if the leopard had no memory of lions

due to a life in complete captivity. The strong smell charged with pheromones would have told the leopard that there was a larger predatory Felid in the area and to avoid it. These messages would even tell the leopard the condition of the lion.

Towards the latter part of his life Quentin dedicated his life to his own new design of animal trap (the rose cuff), that caught the animal but did not harm it and was useful as it could be used on a variety of mammals. Sadly Quentin died in 2002 before he saw his dream made reality but thankfully his father George Rose picked up the torch and continued with his son's noble work. As Anthony said these traps are now very successful in Canada.

The Woman who gave birth to rabbits - the Mary Toft case

Oll Lewis

OLL LEWIS: Crypto Cons - More Rabbit Than Sainsbury's.
Part One April 8th 2011

In the 18th century very little was known about genetics, indeed it was not until the 19th century that Gregor Mendel came up with the concept of genes and even then his work was largely unknown for decades, and doctors, scientists and lay-people had no real idea how it was that humans came out of other humans in vaguely human shapes. To most people this didn't really matter to be honest, they just plopped out looking all "humany" and that was an end to it, after all logic would dictate that because you don't get animals giving birth to humans why would a human give birth to an animal? Following on from that logic this was proof to some of the unchanging and well ordered nature of the natural world, imagine the trouble you would have if fish gave birth to humans! Why, the person would drown! The general lack of baby corpses littering rivers was proof enough of the well designed order of nature.

Except nature, and humanity wasn't always well ordered, sometimes there are birth defects or complications during pregnancies. These were, in the 18th century often blamed on some animal having interfered with the pregnancy in some manner. The more uncharitable doctors, midwives and gossips might insinuate that the mother had conceived the child from having had congress with an animal and the more tactful might have suggested that this was as a result of the mother having been startled or scared

by a similar animal during the pregnancy causing the baby to take on the look or traits of that animal .This bizarre superstition persisted into Victorian times among the great uneducated masses of the city slums of London as it was used by sideshow exhibitors as the explanation for why Joseph "The Elephant Man" Merrick looked the way he did.

These hoaky home-spun theories would be pushed to the limit by a strange case in Godalming, Surrey in 1726. Mary Toft the wife of a clothing salesman, miscarried something that had the appearance of a rabbit but with exterior lungs and heart. About 14 days later Mary was said to have given birth to a live rabbit, followed by several more over the subsequent hours and days. None of the bunnies survived for more than a few minutes, but several people are said to have seen the births and the rabbits afterwards.

Reports of the event were published in Mist's Weekly Journal and eventually reached the ear of King George I as a result. The king, who was very intrigued by the reports, was to send his own investigators, his surgeon Nathanial St Andre and the secretary to the Prince of Wales Samuel Molyneux, to Godalming to find out more about the case. It turned out the event had not been a one off and that Mary was still giving birth to rabbits and bits of other animals. One midwife, John Howard, who had initially been sceptical of the claims, had supervised at the birth of 3 cats legs, one rabbits leg, the guts of an animal Howard presumed was a cat and the backbone of an eel. The explanation for the rabbit and cat births was thought to be that Mary had dreamed about or strongly desired each creature during her pregnancy so her baby had turned into them. Shortly after the arrival of the kings investigators Mary gave birth to the torso of a rabbit and St Andre examined her determining that the rabbits had indeed come from her womb. Later that evening Mary gave birth to another rabbit torso in their absence and a head in the presence of the two men. The investigators left either wholly convinced, or perhaps in on the scam although neither actually confessed to it, and submitted a report to the king.

Deciding that all this was so compelling that it needed further study the King then sent another surgeon, Cyriacus Ahlers to investigate Mary Toft and the ever present midwife John Howard. Ahlers was a lot more sceptical of the claims than St Andre and Molyneux had been especially because, when he arrived Ahlers was showing no signs of pregnancy but proceeded to plop out a few bunnies for him on queue. Ahlers noticed that prior to these births Mary had been holding her legs together as if to prevent something falling out and that John Howard insisted in delivering the bunnies with no interference from Ahlers and Mary would cry out in pain whenever Ahlers came too near. When he left he pretended to be convinced in order to get his hands on some of the birthed bunny bits to study further. Ahlers determined that they had been cut with a knife and found straw and grain in their digestive tract and faeces. All was not looking good for Toft and Howard's story and things were also looking bad for St Andre as well who had endorsed the claims. Howard somehow caught wind of what was happening, probably via St Andre, and wrote a letter requesting the immediate return of specimens. St Andre returned to Surrey to see Howard and was handed two more rabbits that Mary had supposedly given birth to. St Andre also used the trip to collect affidavits from all concerned just so he could use them to cast doubt on Ahlders' version of events should he ever need to. St Andre then gave the king an anatomical demonstration of the births which led to the king asking for Mary Toft to be brought to London for more examination.
There were two comments: The first from Dale Drinnon:

My mother absolutely believed in the story of the woman that gave birth to rabbits: I had to break the news to her later that it was a hoax when I learned of the details. My mother also absolutely believed human males had a penis bone and they could be "ruined" by somebody breaking the bone-a horror story she used to admonish us with. I later found out that was not true either-evidently her uncle had told her these stories and she grew up believing him.

Best Wishes, Dale D.

The second from Richard Freeman:

The idea of imprinting the features of an animal that scared the mother during pregnancy. Lingered much longer than this. My grandad was convinced that a man he saw riding a bike on a regular basis in his youth had been imprinted with pig features when a swine had scared his mother. The unfortunate fellow had one large, pig like ear, a tusk and a snout like nose as well as a ruddy, porcine completion.

Part Two. April 10th 2011

You would think that being moved to London at the request and expense of the King of England would have made Mary Toft and her collaborators think twice about organizing more human-rabbit births. It was probably organized and agreed to in the first place as an exercise to call her bluff; surely, if this was all a hoax and they had any common sense, she, her husband Joshua and midwife John Howard would see sense and abandon the charade before they got in any deeper. Unfortunately though they were not really that intelligent and like most stupid people who get into similar circumstances they were probably busy congratulating themselves on how they had been clever enough to fool all these big city types with their fancy qualifications and thought themselves to be invincible. The trouble was that the Toft and Howard were not fooling everyone, in fact it was probably only the first surgeon who had seen them, Nathanial St Andre, and the secretary to the Prince of Wales, Samuel Molyneux, who had wholly convinced by the validity of Mary Toft `s rabbit births. St Andre, the King's surgeon, had foolishly staked his reputation on Mary's unusual births and issued challenges that anyone who did not believe him could visit Mary and witness a birth in person.

St Andre's challenge was one thing when Mary was living out in the sticks in Surrey, only one surgeon, Cyriacus Ahlers, who had like St Andre also been sent by the King, bothered making the trip. Ahlers found evidence of the rabbits and other animal parts Mary had been giving birth to having been cut by knives and found straw in their droppings so

was less than impressed by the evidence. However, when Mary was moved to the bustling metropolis of London, right slap bang in the middle of the enlightenment it put her within easy reach of most of England's reputable surgeons and gentlemen scientists so visits and investigations became more frequent. Naturally Mary obliged her visitors by conveniently plopping out bits of meat in their presence every time, despite usually not appearing to be pregnant.

One such visitor was Richard Manningham, who had gone to collect Mary Toft from Surrey with St Andre. Manningham was completely unconvinced by Mary and identified one of the bits she had plopped out for him as a fully grown pigs bladder that still contained urine. St Andre was able to convince some of the London set with Mary's displays though, John Maubray, one of the leaders of the male midwife movement, gladly jumped on the bunny birth bandwagon as this vindicated his theory of "sooterkin". According to Maubray, and several others at the time, Mary's strange rabbit births were small creatures named sooterkin, formed in the womb as a result of over familiarity with household pets. A more respected midwife than Maubray and expert in female anatomy. James Douglas, was often invited to view a birth by St Andre but felt sure that the births were a hoax.

While in London it was decided to put Mary Toft under constant supervision and during this time, whenever she had a visitor that wanted to see her giving birth to a rabbit she would go into labour but produce nothing.

The endgame for Mary and her collaborators began when Thomas Onslow started to investigate the affair. Onslow had Mary's husband Joshua, who had been more or less ignored by most people investigating the case, followed. Joshua was caught red handed buying rabbits for use in the hoax. Upon hearing the news that Joshua had been caught buying rabbits one of the porters that was charged with looking after Mary also confessed that he had been bribed by Mary's sister in law to smuggle rabbits and other animal parts into a hiding place in Mary's room. Still refusing to believe she had been rumbled,

Mary continued to deny it had been a hoax when interrogated by Richard Manningham and James Douglas. During these interrogations Manningham examined her and found that she still had something in her uterus, eventually, after Manningham threatened to cut her open painfully to find out what it was, Mary confessed. It turned out that it was the rest of the cat, of which parts had been delivered by John Howard in one of the first fake births. Immediately following her initial miscarriage Mary Toft had inserted animal parts into her uterus after being told how to do this, she claimed, by a gypsy who said that if she were to do that she would become famous and want for nothing. After her uterus had contracted she had started pushing meat and body parts into her vagina and birthing them by opening her legs, after a bit of theatrical moaning.

As all this was happening St Andre was busy publishing a 40 page book on Mary's strange sooterkin,[1] which was published on the 3rd of December 1726, leading to a humiliating climb down by him on the 9th of December when the hoax finally came to light. St Andre lost his position as the Kings surgeon as a result of the affair. Two years later in the houses of parliament he was to encounter Samuel Molyneux once more, and received widespread condemnation when Molyneux died in his arms after suffering an apparent fit in the chamber and it was alleged that St Andre had poisoned him and used his position as a surgeon to prevent him from getting help before he died. St Andre then eloped with Molyneux's rich widow, so there may well have been something in those accusations. Indeed, the whole Toft affair could well have been used by St Andre as cover for an affair with Molyneux's wife.

Mary Toft and John Howard appeared in court the following January. Howard was fined £800 for his part in the scam and Mary was briefly incarcerated. Ill health was to secure her release and she went back to her husband in Godalming where she later had a normal, healthy and human daughter.

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[1] A sooterkin is a small creature that women were fabled to be able to give birth to.

THREE NOTES ON THE BUNYIP

Bob Skinner passed the following article to me:

Hereford Times December 13th 1845 page 1

VERY LIKE A WHALE. An Australian paper, the Squatters` Advocate, has the following, under the heading, "Wonderful discovery of a new animal." - In our last number, we gave an account of the finding of the fragment of the knee joint of some gigantic animal,which, from there being no such animal hitherto known to exist in Australia, we supposed to be the fossil remains of some early period.

Fig 1 Bunyip skull.

The Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science 1847

Wikepedia Creative Commons

Subsequent information, however, coupled with the fact that the bone was in good preservation, and had altogether a recent appearance, has induced a to alter our opinion. On the bone being shown to an intelligent black, he at once recognised it as belonging to the `bunyip`, which he declared he had seen. On being requested to make a drawing of it, he did

so without hesitation. The bone and the picture were then shown separately to different blacks, who had no opportunity of communicating with each other, and they one and all recognised the bone and picture as belonging to the bunyip, repeating the name without variation. One declared that he knew where the whole of the bones of one animal was to be found;another stated that his mother was killed by one of them at the Barwon lakes, within a few miles of Geelong, and that another woman was killed on the very spot where the punt crosses the Barwon, at South Geelong. The most direct evidence of all was that of Mumbowran , who showed several deep wounds on his breast, made by the claws of the animal. Another statement was made, that a mare, the property of Mr. Furlong,was, about six years ago, seized by one of these animals on the bank of "the Little River", and only escaped with a broken leg. - They say that the reason why no white man has ever seen it, is because it is amphibious, and does not come on land except on extremely hot days, when it basks on the bank; but on the slightest noise or whisper it rolls gently over into the water, scarcely creating a ripple. We have adduced these authorities before giving a description of the animal, lest from its strange,grotesque, and nondescript character, the reader should have at once set down the whole as fiction. The bunyip,then,is represented as uniting the characteristics of a bird or alligator; it has the head resembling an emu, with a long bill, at the extremity of which is a transverse projection on each side, with serrated edges, like the bone of a stingray. Its body and legs partake of the nature of the alligator. The hind legs are remarkably thick and strong, and the forelegs are much longer, but still of great-strength. The extremities are furnished with long claws, but the blacks say its usual method of killing prey is hugging it to death. When in the water it swims like a frog, and when on shore it walks on its hind legs with its head erect, in which position it measures 12 or 13 feet in height. Its breast is said to be covered with different coloured feathers; but the probability is that the blacks have not had a sufficiently near view to ascertain whether this appearance might not arise

from hair or scales. They describe it as laying eggs of double the size of the emu`s egg, of a pale blue colour; those eggs they frequently meet with, but as they are `no good for eating` the black boys set them up for a mark, and throw stones at them. (1)

GREAT LAKE "BUNYIP"

What Mr Parker Saw

Rare Beetles Found

The Mercury (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954), Monday 4 March 1935, page 8. This is an abbreviated account leaving out the references to beetles.

"The bunyip" at the Great Lake has had many descriptions fastened on to her, but so far I have not heard anyone who has described it as a beetle" said Mr Critchley Parker on arrival in Launceston on Saturday morning. He was referring to the fact that he had been fortunate enough to find two rare beetles in the Great Lake, which proved that there were "other things in the lake other than `bunyips.`

I read with interest of the reappearance of the common (female) seal, which has become known to the newspaper readers throughout Tasmania as the `bunyip`. My original statement was made to `The Mercury` in a short article, and was followed up by a personal interview with the late Mr Simmonds. I was crossing the dam with with the superintendent of the Government Printing Office (he being some 20 yards behind). At the fourth arch from the north end of the dam at the lake, and in eight feet of perfectly clear water, I saw a seal floating on top of the water, not more than 15 feet below me. I saw the soft beautiful brown eyes of the seal, and the yellowish fur, I marked the spot on the cement and later confirmed the depth of the water from a boatIt was a perfectly calm day. The sky was clear, and there was a bright sun. The time was approximately between 4.30 and 5 o`clock in the afternoon.

For 37 years I have known of the existence of a seal or seals in either the lagoon before the dam was built, and the possibility of a seal in the Great Lake itself after the dam was completed. When one is on the shore one is raised very little above the surface of the water. I have seen musk ducks and very large species of platypus, but I felt it quite unsafe to venture an opinion until I saw my seal in the circumstances related. (2)

I found the following story via Trove, from **The Sydney Morning Herald** of September 9th 1949 page 4.

Weird Animal "Uses Ears As Paddles"

MELBOURNE. - Kyneton has joined in the open season for bunyips.

Mr and Mrs L.Keegan reported to-day that several times in the past fortnight they had been astounded by what they described as an animal at least four feet long, with long shaggy ears , in the new Laurisior reserviour, adjoining their property.

They said it used its ears to propel itself through the water "at tremendous speed."

" It dives and has remained under water for a considerable distance before surfacing", they said.

" When it submerges the noise can be heard from about 20 yards away"

The Keegans are unable to say if it has fur or feathers, because they have not been able to get a close-up view of it. But they are certain of two things - it is larger than a swan and has long ears.

Mr J.Beare, a school teacher on holidays, saw the animal twice and has confirmed the description given by the Keegans. (3)

REFERENCES

1. Hereford Times December 13th 1845 p. 1

2. The Mercury March 4th 1935 p. 8

3. The Sydney Morning Herald September 9th p.4

Fig 2 Aboriginal Myths - The Bunyip. 1890.

Mike Hardcastle/Trove

NOTES AND QUERIES

A note in **History of British Animals** by John Fleming (1828) says:

"Ray takes note of the L.*viridis* , or Green Lizard…, as inhabiting Ireland. It occurs in Guernsey; and, according to Pennant, it has been propogated in England. The upper parts of the body being a rich, variegated green, the belly whitish, and the length being from 18 inches to 30 inches, distinguish it from the L.agilis. Pennant mentions a lizard, probably of this species, " which was killed near Woscot, in the parish of Swinford, Worcestershire, "which was 2 feet 6 inches long, and 4 inches in girth. The fore-legs were placed 8 inches from the head; the hind-legs 5 inches beyond these; the legs two inches long; the feet divided into four toes, each furnished with sharp claw. Another was killed at Penbury, in the same county. Whether these are not of exotic descent, and whether the breed continues, is what we are at present uninformed of." - British Zoology iii . 22(1)

In the **Statistical Account of Little Dunkeld, Perth and Kinross,** (1793) by the Rev John Robertson, Vol. Vi p. 361 is the following note. " A quadruped found in the moors at the eastern extremity of the parish, is entitled to notice as a remarkable variety of the Lizard tribe. It is about 9 inches long, the body, or trunk, is of an unusual length in proportion to the tail, which does not taper gradually from the hind feet , as in other lizards, but becomes suddenly small, like that of a mouse. The back is full of small protuberances, and guarded with a skin almost as hard as a sea shell. The eyes large, clear, and circular, like those of an ordinary trout; the jaws more than an inch in length,and the teeth so strong as to be heard making a ringing noise upon the iron point of a pole at a distance of more than ten feet. It is believed in that part of the country, that, about 50 years ago, the bite of this animal proved fatal to a child two years old. It is never seen but upon very dry ground. When irritated it expresses rage by the reddening and glistening of its eyes." (2)

ATLANTIS

UNIVERSAL DELUGE

Scientific Confirmation Of

Actual Occurrence

ATLANTIS ALSO EXISTED

The following appeared in the South China Morning Post of February 7th 1940.

The scientific confirmation that the Universal Deluge actually occurred in the days of Noah and that the mythical island of Atlantis existed 10,000 B.C is claimed to have been reached by the famed Italian scientist and astronomer, Professor Raffaele Bendandi. [1]

In an exclusive interview by telephone from his hometown of Faenza, Professor Bendandi stated to the *United Press* that his recent discovery of four planets beyond Neptune gave him the first indication on which he has been working ever since.

The youthful Professor stated : "Owing to my recent discovery I have been able to ascertain that those celestial bodies regulate our entire solar system. It is their huge power of attraction on the world axis which caused all geological movements and earthquakes. By means of careful research work on the movement of these planets I have now reached the conclusion, supported by scientific proof, that the Universal Deluge actually occurred in the year 2687 B.C as stated in the Bible. Continuing my research I have also obtained scientific proof that the mythical Island Atlantis actually existed West of the Pillars of Hercules and was submerged beneath the Atlantic Ocean in the Autumn

[1] "Professor Bendandi (1893-1979) was a pseudo scientist who specialised in the prediction of earthquakes." Wikipedia.

of the year 10,008 B.C.

Professor Bendandi added that that both the existence and the date of submersion of Atlantis are confirmed by the Greek philosopher Plato in his writings. (3)

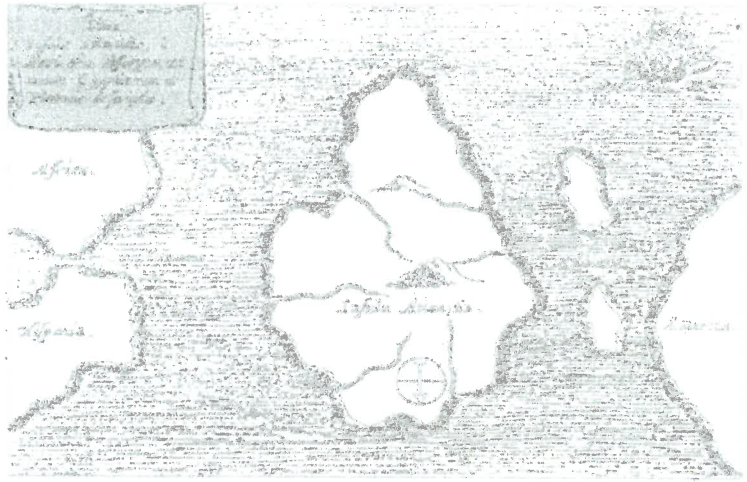


Fig 1 Map of Atlantis by Athanasius Kircher 1669

Wikipedia Creative Commons

THE JAPANESE MYSTERY TORTOISE THAT WASN`T

In September 2012 my Mum and I visited Whitby, Yorkshire and its main Museum. In the Asian ethnographical cabinet I noticed a Japanese natural history book (see front cover of this issue of Flying Snake.)

The book had a small plaque next to it which said: **Book of Natural History** from Japan. Dated Spring in the First Year of Genji (1864) Gift of H.P. Kendall in 1955 WHITM : ETH 63. I posted a note about this on Cryptozoology Online on October 5th asking for information about this brightly coloured tortoise as I thought it might be of cryptozoological interest but I received no replies. I asked Allen Salzberg of Herpetology Digest if he could help me identify it and with his help I found out the following from Peter Paul van dyke head of Turtle Conservation at Conservation International:

" I would not think this is identifiable - the scute pattern is unlike any real turtle (last vertebral projecting over the tail, instead of having supracaudals), the head pattern matches no current or historic Japanese species (including Taiwan, Korea etc.), and while there is a faint resemblance to *Geomyda japonica* from the Ryu Kyu islands , I would treat this as a likely composite of one or more real animal parts (a partial shell or so) sketched at a different time that this actual illustration was made, with liberal interpretation by the artists to fill in missing bits; or the artist copying from other drawings to try and produce a different posture. This is in some contrast to many of the classic woodcut prints of turtles, which tend to be clearly drawn from live specimens of *Mauremys japonica* ." (4)

According to Peter Pritchard:

"Richard: the Japanese turtle illustration is almost certainly based on Geoemyda japonica, a very prized species now protected and considered to be a national treasure. It occurs only on islands off the south end of Japan (Okinawajima, Kumejima, and Tokashikijima. The artwork is very attractive, but is only a very rough representation of the species." (5)

FLYING ADDERS

This extract is from Aubyn Bernard Rochfort Trevor-Battye`s **Pictures in Prose of Nature,Wild sport,and Humble life** (1894). It relates to somewhere in Britain, I`m not sure where, possibly Kent:

"The country folk in certain parts are firmly persuaded that the adder as it grows old develops a pair of wings and flies about. They quite believe that they have seen it flying. This diabolical accomplishment intensifies the terrors of the " death-arder." Everything that creeps and looks like a snake is a death adder. The idea arose in the church, by mistake for "deaf adder," long years before the School Board came." (6)

Now another one of those weird Chinese creatures I love:

Freak Bird

HAS HEAD LIKE A MONKEY

(Hong Kong - By Air Mail)

"With the head of a monkey, a strange bird is reported to have been caught in Hankow.

Measuring three feet in height and eight feet in breadth, the creature is said to have " fur-like black feathers, four toes on each foot, and a mouth shaped like the bill of an eagle." This was reported in the Mirror newspaper of Perth Australia on July 17th 1937." (7)

The following strange story of a Two-Legged Snake from Japan appeared in The Straits Times on August 1st 1922:

The Straits Times August 1st 1922

THE TWO-LEGGED SNAKE

Wonderful Reptile Found in Japan

"While naturalists are discussing the origin of China`s dragon, the capture of something of the sort at the summer resort of Karuizawa, Japan, may assist them. The creature is said to have been a two-legged, horned snake, and referring to it he Japan Advertiser says:- "From description it sounds as if it was a cross between an ordinary snake and a Rocky Mountain billygoat. It is 5 feet 9 inches long and at the largest 5 inches in circumference. It has two legs about 18 inches from the tip of the tail. Nor is that all. A horn protrudes above each eye. As children were passing through the grass and bamboo at Pulpit Rock on Monday the snake stood erect and darted its fangs at them. Men came to the rescue, killed it and have spent most of the time since repenting for not capturing such a rare specimen alive. The reptile is now preserved in alcohol at a shop on the "Machi" and the people here say that nothing like it has ever been seen before in Japan. From the description your correspondent is inclined to believe that no such creature has ever been seen elsewhere. Persons who read this may be inclined to believe that it has never been seen at Karuizawa. This story, however, comes from an eye-witness,who, by the way, is a good American prohibitionist"

Writing on the subject of this discovery, an American correspondent of the N.C.Daily News[1] says - " I have seen a good many curious things in the course of my rambles but a snake which stands upon its hind legs has not so far been numbered among them , and the first impression was that it must have been some fancy born of the 35th drink or thereabouts. On glancing further down your article, however, I see that the witness was a prohibitionist, and it seems to me that if this is the effect that prohibition is going to have on people,well,

[1] North China Daily News

the sooner the 18th Amendment [2]is put into the discard the better."(8)

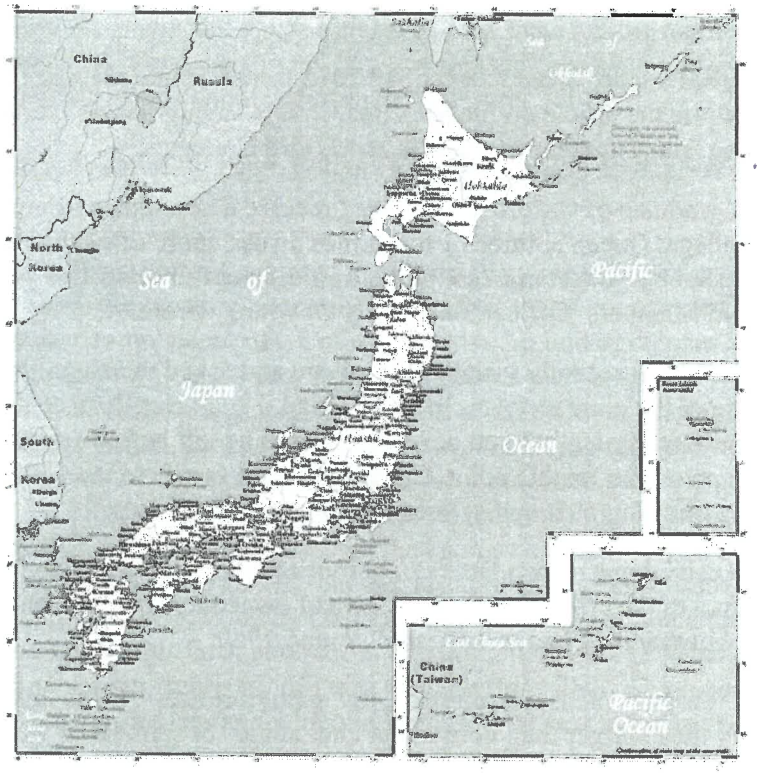


Fig 2 Map of Japan

Wikipedia Creative Commons

[2] The 18th Amendment established prohibition of the consumption of alcohol in the United States of America with the law taking effect on January 17th 1920. It was repealed in its entirety by the 21st Amendment on December 5th 1933. (Wikipedia.)

THE OXFORD COLLEGES ANCIENT TORTOISE

I received a letter dated August 31st 2012 from Richard George, who wrote the article on Steller`s Sea Cow in Flying Snake 3, concerning some "giant tortoises" at an Oxford College:

"As a graduate of Oxford University I receive a newsletter from my old college, Queen`s, three or four times a year, more often than not rattling a beg-bucket marked " Sign of the Times". Earlier this year the Old Members `Officer, one Emily Downing, wrote:

"A gentleman recently visited the College and asked me about the demise of the giant tortoises in Front Quad. I shall readily accept he was pulling my leg but you never know, and he left before I could really press him on this point. Can anyone else testify to the College having once (c. 1930s-40s) been home to some tortoises?"

She received one or two letters - appropriately enough from centenarians - to the effect that the college had owned tortoises of some kind, but that they had disappeared around 1950.

What intrigues me is the reference to " giant tortoises". Does this simply mean larger than normal pet chelonians, or something Galapagosesque? (9)

My friend Rob Wilkes did a bit of his own digging into this case and, working at the Bodleian Library, found out the story reproduced from *Floreat Domus* Issue 13, 2007 below:

"With the sad and unexplained disappearance in 2003 of Rosa Luxembourg, the much-loved College tortoise who had been here since the 1960s, it is high time that we welcomed a successor to her.
The new tortoise sensibly waited until after the Balliol Ball to make its formal appearance, and is a surprisingly lively and engaging creature.

Whilst its existence may not prove conclusively Balliol's green credentials, or do anything for the College's carbon footprint, the tortoise is a welcome addition to the membership of this institution.
So far, 'it' does not have a name, although we are open to suggestions from Old Members and anyone else who may have an idle moment.
We think that it may be a male, but – as was the case even with Rosa Luxembourg – we cannot unfortunately be sure."(10)

The book Tortoise by Peter Young (Reaktion Books) contains the following:

"Oriel College, Oxford, adopted its original tortoise as a mas-cot in about 1896, the creature becoming so familiar that it was elected an honorary vice-president of a College society. An undergraduate found a companion for it in his bed. When the mascot died in 1923 it was stuffed. So lifelike was the result that one of the fellows, finding it in the common room, took it out into the sun. The living tradition continued with two tortoises on whose shells were blazoned the College arms. On 28 May a tiny tortoise appeared in a quadrangle by the side of the other two, with Ichabod inscribed across its shell. His birth was announced on 31 May in The Times: 'testudo, to Georgina, wife of O.C.Testudo, a son (Whalley George).' He was believed to be the only tortoise to have his birth announced in The Times. George Whalley was the honorary secretary of Oriel College Boat Club, which had the tortoise as its emblem and which in Eights Week had failed to come head of the river. On the first night that the college boat made a bump (touching the boat in front of it), Georgina laid an egg. The next day, when the boat made another bump,a second egg was laid, but there were no more bumps or eggs provoking the provost's observation that we will never know whether Georgina's productivity would have continued in arithmetic or geometric progression. Only the provost's wife or daughter could properly give birth within the College precincts, and sometime after the appearance of the birth notice in The Times an academic colleague of the provost said that he was unaware that the provost's daughter had married an Italian.

Fig 1 Queen`s College Oxford

Wikipedia Creative Commons

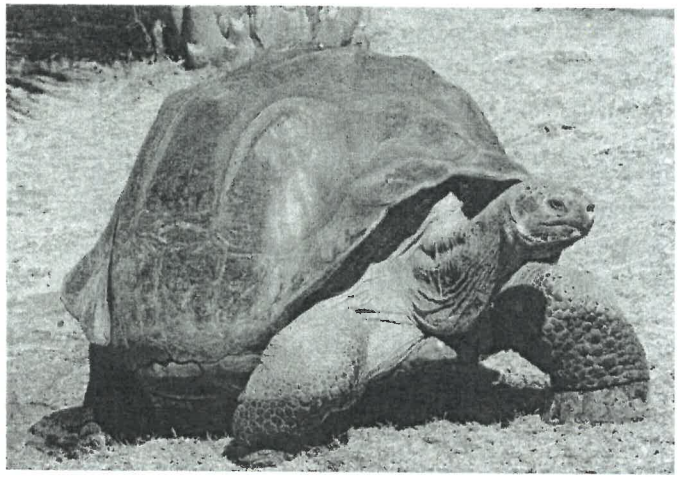


Fig 2 Galapagos tortoise. Wikipedia Creative Commons

Testudo was much kidnapped by under-graduates from other colleges. To his displeasure, other tortoises, some having the names of fellows painted on their backs, were added to the College collection. When he died in 1949 the provost penned a short elegy:

All his slow life he kept his secret well
Of what he loved and hated and believed;
It died with him, and we whom he deceived
Interrogate in vain his empty shell"(11)

On October 5th 2012 Rob Wilkes told me: "By the way, a colleague remembers that New College had a giant tortoise in the mid-'70s that was supposed to be 100 years old." Richard George also mentioned the Oxford College tortoises to Karl Shuker who had his own "take" on the subject in the November 2012 Fortean Times:

"In case you`re wondering what this has to do with cryptozoology, there is a bona fide link. Living giant tortoises are known today only from the Galapagos Islands off Ecuador and from the Indian Ocean island of Aldabra. Just a few centuries ago,however, additional species also existed on the Seychelles, but these were believed to have been wiped out - until, in the past two decades, certain captive specimens hitherto believed to belong to the Aldabran species were unmasked by DNA and other analyses to be surviving individuals of two of the supposedly lost species from the Seychelles. Consequently, if giant tortoises did once exist at Oxford University, it is just possible that they too belong to these formerly `hidden` species of `hidden` species of Seychelles giant tortoise, in turn meaning that if their bodies have been preserved and can be located, they will be of great scientific significance." (12)

A MEWING MALAYSIAN SNAKE

The China Mail of October 18th 1935 carried the following:

MALAYAN SNAKE SAID TO MEW LIKE A CAT

"An 8 foot opistoglyph, a canibalistically inclined snake, believed capable of meow-ing like a cat, has arrived at the West New Brighton Zoo. It was sent to Mr Caril Stryker, director of the zoo by Mr A St. Alban Smith, British rubber planter in the Malay States. Mr St Alban Smith wrote that the natives believed the snake was able to make feline sounds. Reptile experts are doubtful- Reuter." (13)

1. J. Fleming History of British Animals (1828)
2. Rev J. Robertson Statistical Account of Little Dunkeld , Perth and Kinross (1793) Vol VI p.361
3. South China Morning Post. February 7th 1940
4. E-mail from A.Salzberg to R.Muirhead October 4th 2012
5. Ibid
6. A.Trevor-Battye Pictures in Prose of Nature, Wild sport and Humble Life (1894) p.239
7. Mirror. July 17th 1937
8. The Straits Times August 1st 1922
9. Letter from Richard George to Richard Muirhead August 31st 2012
10. Floreat Domus Issue 13 2007

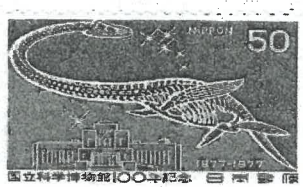
11. P. Young Tortoise (2004) pp 126-127
12. Karl Shuker. Alien Zoo. Fortean Times November 2012 p. 25
13. The China Mail October 18th 1935.

BOOK REVIEW

Sea Serpent Carcasses. Scotland: From the Stronsa Monster to Loch Ness. Glen Vaudrey. Bideford England : CFZ Press 2012 ISBN 978-1-905723-93-5

This excellent book is a "grand tour" around the coast and many islands of Scotland (which is dear to my heart,look at my sur name - Richard.) and its surprisingly frequent sea-monster strandings, starting with the Alba case of 906 A.D. recorded in the Irish Annals of Innisfallen, then the famous Stronsa Monster of 1808 with a number of intriguing illustrations and quotations from the time of the incident. The Loch Ness Monster, not surprisingly, makes an appearance, but not the famous cases from the start of the "modern period" i.e. 1933, but 1868, a hoax reported in the Inverness Courier - the corpse of a northern bottlenose whale. The most recent case is that of a strange lump of flesh washed up at the Bridge of Don in 2011. The book includes Glen`s unique plastacine (?)carcass creations and other art-work,also there are copious maps and a Conclusion and Random Musings,Bibliography,Index. Dr Devo says -buy it for a friend or relative for Christmas!

Letters to Flying Snake



CAT CONVENTION

The following letter was e-mailed me on February 16th 2010 from Patrick Foord in response to a letter I had published in Fortean Times # 253 September 2009 concerning cat conventions:

Cat "conventions"

I am interested in reports of cat "conventions (FT # 245:75) - that is, gatherings of domestic cats in a circle, usually at night, with a larger cat sitting in the centre in an open space, apparently directing proceedings. If anyone has any further information or can point out accounts in the literature, please write in.

Richard Muirhead

Dear Mr Sutton

I was reading a back issue and chanced upon the letter from Mr Muirhead regarding `cat conventions`, page 73 of that issue.

If possible would you be kind enough to pass on my experience of this phenomenon to this gentleman.
I was aged about 14, and was awakened in the small hours of the morning by incessant noise from a number of cats nearby. My parent`s back garden was circled by a high wall, and beyond one side was a road. The noise seemed to be coming from that direction, so I grabbed the top of the wall and hoisted my head above the brickwork and peered into the street-lit road.

I was astonished to see a large circle of cats surrounding two cats in the centre who appeared to be facing each other off. The proceedings appeared to be under the authority of a large ginger tom who was sitting in the circle to one side of the other two, and apparently overseeing the confrontation. At the appearance of my head over the wall all of the cats ran off in fright, including the apparent contestants. All, that is,save the large ginger tom who still sat,looked at me for a few seconds, then slowly got up,and very disdainfully turned his head away,and walked off slowly down the road with his tail erect. I have never since read of any similar event, but clearly since Mr Muirhead expressed his interest est it is not such a totally unknown phenomenon as I had supposed

Kind regards Patrick Foord

DR WHO AND FLYING SNAKES

A letter from Oll Lewis dated September 30th 2012

As readers of "Flying Snake" will know two well known sightings of snakes with wings, or Gwybers, have occurred in South Wales. Interestingly the TV show Doctor Who has filmed where these sightings were said to have happened since it was re-launched several years ago. Until recently scenes like the Tardis interior shots were filmed in the Upper Boat Studio near Culverhouse Cross and Exterior and on location shots for the episode "Tooth and Claw" were filmed in Penllyne and Penllyne Castle. By coincidence the episode filmed in Penllyne featured a cryptid too in this case a Werewolf. Sad to say it wasn't the best of episodes, but if you're interested in seeing the locations of the Penllyne Gwiber sightings and can't go there in person then the episode is worth watching.

Oll Lewis

BUTTERFLY AND MOTH PHOBIA

Richard George wrote to me on May 11 2012 ;

Dear Richard,

RE *Notes and Queries* in *FS* 2…

I`ve never heard of lepidopterophobia with butterflies of British dimensions, although I can certainly imagine people being afraid of tropical ones.

Moths, on the other hand…both my mother and I are distinctly uneasy with them. In Mum`s case, it stems from a childhood encounter with the rare Death`s Head Hawkmoth, *Acherontia atropos,* in an overgrown garden in Birkenhead. I had a similar not-quite-panic attack a few years ago in my home when confronted with an Old Lady Moth, *Mormo maura.* It appeared from nowhere on my landing and seemed to chase me around.

And yet this moth (*Mormo maura*) was little different in size to a butterfly. Do we tend to fear moths more because of their association with night? Or is it, to paraphrase George Harrison, something in the way they move?

Now I`m off and running on music, one of the great lines of all time is Jim Morrison`s "The scream of butterfly…" from *When The Music`s Over.* That *is* scary.

With best wishes,

Richard George